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THE EVOLUTION OF RELIGION

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WHAT DO WE MEAN BY RELIGION?

It is often said that no people entirely destitute of religion has ever been discovered. And it is true that no people whose thoughts and practices we have learned to understand adequately has been without social activities to which the name religion could be applied, provided that name be given a sufficiently wide definition.

The word religion has received many definitions. Historically the most characteristic substance of religion has been beliefs concerning relations with unseen powers or beings, whether here or hereafter, and the emotions and practices elicited by those beliefs. Religion, however, might be defined as those ideas contemplation of which is found, in the experience of any people, to raise life to the highest level, together with the emotions and practices prompted by the contemplation of those ideas. The latter definition, however, would express rather an ideal of the meaning which the word religion may sometime convey than a description of all the religions that have existed or that still exist, for religions have contained much that debased life, and omitted many of the most ennobling elements in the life of the peoples by whom they were believed.

According to our second and idealistic, or normative, definition of religion, conversion is a readjustment of attention, bringing into the middle of the stage, in our mental drama, the ennobling ideas—whatever they may be—and sending away from the spotlight of attention the ideas that drag life down. Every adult has a multitude of ideas stored in memory but makes habitual daily use of only a few, and these give to life its character. Instinctive propulsions, and the suggestions of the general social environment, are sure to thrust themselves forward, but the ideas that have been more recently developed, which differentiate man from his less

evolved progenitors and which tend to raise him above the commonplace, must be diligently brought to mind.

The religious man, in our normative sense of the word religious, is one who discriminates between the ideas that give life dignity and worth and those which drag life down or anchor it to mediocrity, who takes the necessary pains to keep the ennobling ideas in the forefront of his attention, and who, by so doing, responds strongly to those conceptions by aid of which he most completely realizes his possibilities.

According to our normative definition of religion any man may be religious; for to every man some ideas are more ennobling than others. With the same man religion may pass through various stages, the ideas that once most warmed and fed him may lose their hold upon his mind and their power to set in motion the mechanism of his being, yet he may be no less religious if he takes no less pains to recognize and to keep in the place of dominance those conceptions that in his new stage of growth prove themselves most uplifting.

For purposes of evolutionary study we must turn back from our normative conception of religion to its historical description. Religion, far from being a matter of indifference to the "savage," in reality "absorbs nearly the whole of life." "His daily actions are governed by ceremonial laws of the severest, often of the most irksome and painful character."¹ The Dyaks of Borneo, "when they lay out their fields, gather the harvest, go hunting or fishing, contract a marriage, start on a warlike expedition, propose a commercial journey, or anything of importance, always consult the gods, offer sacrifices, celebrate feasts, study the omens, obtain talismans, and so on, often thus losing the best opportunity for the business itself." "It was a severe shock to the Pueblo Indians to see the white settlers plant corn without any religious ceremony, and a much greater one to see that the corn grew, flourished, and bore abundant crops!" Captain Clark, an officer of our army with the widest experience of Indian life, is thus quoted: "It seems a startling assertion, but it is I think true that there are no people who pray more than the Indians. Both superstition and custom keep

¹ Brinton, *Religions of Primitive Peoples*, pp. 17 ff.

always in their minds the necessity for placating the anger of the invisible and omnipotent power, and for supplicating the active exercise of his faculties in their behalf." And Brinton says of primitive people that the injunction to "pray always" is nowhere else so nearly carried out.

The beliefs and practices commonly spoken of as religion grow from four roots each of which requires our attention.

I. MAGIC

Magic may or may not contain any idea of relationship with unseen persons.

a) Magic which does not depend upon ideas of relationship with unseen beings probably is not to be regarded as a part of religion, but it is too important and too closely related to religious notions to be omitted from our discussion. This magic which depends upon no ideas of unseen persons is the predecessor of applied natural science. Primitive man, not knowing what really causes the effects that interest him, that harm or benefit him, guesses what might have caused the evil or the good he has experienced, and what may cause the good or evil that he anticipates with hope or dread, and like the man of science he acts upon his hypothesis. In the development of magic there are certain steps which must be enumerated at the outset, since they are to be seen in the development both of impersonal and of personal, or religious, magic.

1. Desire suggests ideas. The desires are at first predominantly practical. Man wants to *do* something that will secure good or avert harm. His child is sick and he wants to do something to cause recovery; he is going fishing and he wants to insure a catch. Because ignorant of what *does* affect the result, he is free to imagine that anything *may* affect it. He feels that he must do something and so he thinks of something to do. The brighter, more imaginative he is the more he thinks of that may bring either good or harm.

2. Whatever arrests his *attention* in connection with the result, so far as he knows, may cause it. Especially do suggestive *analogies* rivet attention and hint at causal relation. Thus the father during the couvade must not eat what would disagree with the new-born

babe; the pregnant woman must not eat any animal that was killed by a wound in the entrails; to eat the heart of a lion will make one brave; and to cause sand to patter on the hut is part of the ceremony of making rain.

3. In order to be believed an idea has only to be clear, of practical interest, and free from inconsistency with previous knowledge or belief. The less one knows the less there is to contradict whatever ideas may occur to him, so that to one who lacks established ideas by which to test new notions every fancy may be true.

4. Once the idea occurs to the mind that a given act or thing is favorable or unfavorable to a keenly desired result, no chances are taken, the lucky thing or act is not omitted, and the unlucky one is avoided. This tendency we still witness in the reluctance of many to sit among thirteen at the table.

5. To act upon an idea strengthens it in the mind of the actor, and also suggests it to others. When the idea that this or that will bring either good or evil is suggested to B by the action of A, the faith may be stronger in the mind of B than if it had first arisen in his own mind—it comes with *authority*—and after such an idea has become prevalent in a group of savages no one would dare take chances with it.

6. One instance in which the belief works, that is to say, one coincidence between the belief and the event, arrests attention, is told, exaggerated, and retold, and does more to confirm the belief than many instances of failure. Instances of the failure of an established belief to work are explained away on the ground that the rules of the magic were not exactly followed, or that the expected result was otherwise prevented. By the process above outlined nature men develop elaborate systems of pseudo-science for the control of the results which they desire or fear.

The tendency to invent magic is still strong among children and the ignorant, and would go to great lengths if not corrected by knowledge of natural causation supplied to children by their elders and to the ignorant by the better educated. Physicians who attend the ignorant have opportunities to witness the spontaneous invention of new magic to meet emergencies, to insure strength and brightness to new-born infants, or recovery to the suddenly

afflicted. Farmers who insist on doing certain work at "the right time of the moon" illustrate the persistence of the tendency to rely on magic. And the whole system of astrology, which commanded belief among the intelligent during certain stages of our own civilization, shows how hard it is to deny causal efficiency to whatever powerfully arrests the attention, even though as remote as the very stars, provided the nature of real causal connection is dimly apprehended.

b) Magic that is based on supposed relation with invisible persons implies the development of belief in such persons which grows from the second root of religion, next to be discussed. Man seeks to influence unseen beings in three ways:

1. He may believe that by magic he obtains control over them, that if he knows how he can command them and they must obey. The desire to control them suggests a method, as the desire for other results suggests methods, by the mental process above described.

2. He bargains with the unseen beings and seeks their favor by gifts, sacrifices, and services.

3. He seeks to influence them by his words; by flattery and praises he conciliates, and by imploring he seeks to persuade them.

II. ZOÖMORPHISM

The word anthropomorphism denotes the practice of conceiving of unseen beings as having the form and attributes of men. Zoö-morphism denotes the practice of conceiving them to have the form and attributes either of men or other animals, or of fantastic combinations of human and beastly shape and character.

Zoö-morphism is based upon the idea that every effect implies an actor. In the early stages of mental life the idea of causation which is most familiar and intelligible is derived from the issuance of results from our own activity, and from that of other persons and animals whose activity resembles our own. Thus the child and the savage ask, "Who made the moon?"—not "what caused" but "who made" is the natural form of inquiry. Of causation by reflection, refraction, chemical combination, evolutionary processes, etc., there are at first no ideas. And so they ask who makes the

sun rise, traverse the heavens, and set, who makes the rivers flow, the tides surge, the thunder roll, the ice form, the trees put forth their leaves in spring. Wherever there is a deed there must be a doer—there must be great and mighty beings to produce the grand effects in nature, and there must also be a multitude of little beings to produce the countless small effects, too trivial to occupy the dignitaries of the unseen world, to sour the milk, to cause a wart to come or disappear, to cause all the noises, incidents, strokes of luck, and bafflings that fill the hours. To the imaginative mind at this stage of education it appears that the unseen population of the world may well be far more numerous than the seen, and that there must be among them diverse beings, some friendly and some unfriendly to man, great gods and great devils and little sprites, nixies, fairies, gnomes, goblins, elves, brownies, nymphs, dryads, and fauns. A priest, it is said, went on Walpurgis night to count the devils, and being observed by one of them was asked what he was doing. When he confessed his intention he was told that if the Alps were broken into grains of sand and for each grain there were a devil, and he should count so many, he would only have begun to number the devils.

Primitive man feels himself surrounded by unseen beings who can mysteriously benefit or harm him much as the civilized man feels himself surrounded by the omnipresent microbes. And accordingly the one seeks for disinfectants and the other for spirit-scarers.

Here again the desire to do something about it suggests something to do; and the wish that something might have protective power suggests that almost anything that sufficiently arrests attention in connection with the wish may be the right thing.

Among[†] the objects that are thought to be effective as protections against spirits one of the most universal is fire. Fire is highly arrestive to the attention, it is mysterious and has powers to harm or to bless, it comforts us with warmth, it cooks our food, it melts the hard iron, it dispels the terrifying darkness, it spreads a circle of safety from beasts—why not from spirits also? Peoples in all quarters of the globe have regarded a fire, a lamp, a candle, a sacred

[†] Professor W. I. Thomas enumerates to his classes a longer list of spirit-scarers. From him many of the facts here used have been derived.

flame, that must on no account be allowed to go out, as the source of safety from unseen terrors. English farmers used to gather in the wheat fields and build one large fire and twelve smaller ones, representing Christ and the apostles, by this means, together with a great shouting, to drive away the spirits that might cause blight and mildew.

Next to fire as a spirit-scarer is water, a mysterious element that drives out the spirit of thirst and washes away many evil things. The sprinkling of infants to keep away bad influences, holy water, and baptism in many forms represent ancient practices common to many peoples.

Hardly anything is easier than to give an old ceremony a new meaning. Even among us baptism means the descent of the holy spirit, or the washing-away of sin, or the death of an old life and the beginning of a new one. Ancient ceremonies survive with new interpretations. Of this baptism, the sprinkling of holy water, and the burning of candles in churches appear to be illustrations.

Metal that requires the magic of the smith to melt and fashion it, that makes weapons which let out the life, is thought to have mystic powers. So also is food that drives out not only the spirit of hunger but also other evil spirits as well, and brings us strength and cheer in place of despondency, moroseness, and weakness; and hence to scatter rice or other grain is protective and of good omen.

There are not only protective objects, but also protective acts and protective words and speeches formulated by the mind in answer to the desire for safety from the unseen powers. Yelling and racket, bells and tom-toms are thought to drive away evil spirits and assist in the cure of the sick, in the safe passage of the dying, and in the guarding of infants. Threatening gestures, blows, and whipping serve the same purpose. It was thus that the soldiers of Xerxes scourged the Hellespont to drive away or subdue the spirits that disturbed the waters. Liquor is full of "spirits" as we still say, both good spirits that cheer and evil spirits that make men violent and wicked. Therefore before broaching a cask whip it well with switches, and if you want to sell it hang the bundle of switches, or bush, over your door to show that you have plenty of new and well-chastened wine—but "good wine needs no bush" to

advertise it. A whip becomes in itself a protective object, and finally any piece of leather.

Thirteen centuries before Christ, to draw a cross was already a way to make a spirit trap that would catch and hold the invisible beings of evil intent, and far and wide the drawing of a circle or curve is regarded as a way to make a trap to keep them in, or to erect a fortification to keep them out. Perhaps both the curve and the metal of the horseshoe made it seem to our forefathers protective.

In order adequately to understand the tendency to zoömorphism it must be borne in mind that the savage does not look down upon the animals as we do. He cannot build an abode equal to that of the oven-bird or the beaver, he would gladly possess eyes like the hawk, strength like the bear or the ox, courage like the lion, cunning like the fox, the deadly power of the serpent, vigilance not to be surpassed, or skill in stalking game like that of the leopard. In most things to which he aspires the animals surpass him.

Moreover, the sense of mystery demands strange symbols, sets the imagination roaming, and often the fittest embodiment of the powers man fears or worships seems not to be a form like any that he sees but one in which there are combined the shapes of men and beasts, as in griffins, sphynxes, and other imaginary monsters. And when a people has once formed conceptions of the forms of the gods, these conceptions are likely to survive, filled with an enriching symbolism, as ancient ceremonies survive with changed interpretations, and still to be retained when the people become as civilized as the Hindus or Egyptians.

Primitive people not only fear the unseen zoömorphous beings, but also seek their aid. This leads to fetishism. The savage, with the vague notions of causal relationship which alone are possible to men who have made little progress in explanation, thinks that to possess anything that has been in close relation with a person is to establish a mystic relation with that person. He does not carelessly throw aside the skin of the banana he has eaten, for if his enemy should pick it up, would he not have power over the man in whose vitals the pulp of the banana was! The hair cut from his head or any cast-off article that he has made or long worn he care-

fully secretes or destroys. Now if this same savage finds a strangely gnarled stick, or a bit of fossil or meteorite, which evidently has been shaped by some mysterious power, he hopes that by possessing it he may establish relations with the power that shaped it and perhaps still haunts it. And if while he keeps it he has good luck and his prayers are answered, he prizes it and will not willingly part with it, unless for a valuable consideration. If, however, it seems to bring him no good luck, he will throw it away. The value which the savage attaches to the fetish which he carries about with him seems to be of precisely the same sort as that which devout Catholics have attached to relics of the saints, objects that have had close relation with a supernal being and which aid the possessor in maintaining special relations with that being. Grottoes, strange boulders, trees of unusual shape or size men everywhere seem prone to call devil's den, or witches' seat, or the like. Such manifestations and abodes of strange powers also become fetishes. But it is not the great rock or tree that is worshiped. Probably men never anywhere have literally worshiped stocks or stones. As one savage in answer to inquiry declared, "Tree not fetish. Fetish spirit, not seen, live in tree."¹

III. ANCESTOR-WORSHIP

Belief that man is surrounded by spirits arises not only from zoöomorphic interpretation of natural processes and natural events, but also from belief in the survival of human spirits after the death of the body. Thus Codrington in his *Milanesians* says that this people has two words for spirit, one denoting zoöomorphic nature spirits, and the other denoting the spirits of ancestors. Savages do not regard the death of the body as the termination of life; doubt of life after death arises later in men's minds. Belief that the spirit survives dissolution arises in perfectly natural, even inevitable, ways. When a man awakens in the morning and declares that he has been in the forest, seen a foe, or encountered a lion and barely escaped with his life, or that he has been on a journey or had a successful hunt, and those that are with him in the hut know that his body has lain there all night, they conclude and he concludes that he can

¹ Brinton's *Religions of Primitive Peoples*, p. 132.

have experiences in which his body does not participate. It is hard to persuade the child who wakes up terrified that the cause of his fear "was only a dream." Savages have no one to correct their belief in the reality of dreams. Often, to gather at dawn to recount the experiences of the past night is a regular and important part of the day's interest. Some tribes decamp and flee if one of their number dreams of seeing an enemy approaching. Some think that in their shadow and in their reflection they catch glimpses of their own "double." If one is struck on the head his spirit leaves the injured body, after a while he "comes to," or if the injury is too severe the separation is permanent and the body is not reanimated. Then where is the spirit that has withdrawn from the visible form? It must be near! You cannot see it. You can never know when it is seeing you and listening to your words. Therefore "speak no evil of the dead," for who can tell in what mysterious ways the invisible can affect us, or how much of our sickness and ill luck are due to their ill will? Nothing sets bounds to the fancy in its dreadful conjectures about the hovering ghosts. Moreover, ghosts have reason to be vengeful and ill-humored for have they not been driven out of the body and deprived of visible life? Death by blows gives ground for taking vengeance and death by sickness no less, for sickness is practically always attributed by savages to magic, exercised by an enemy. And savages are not prevented from taking vengeance by the fact that they do not know what individual caused the injury.

For such reasons as these savages sometimes try to prevent the escape of the ghosts of those about to die by strangling them and leaving a ligature about the neck, or by driving a stake through the breast. Some peoples who have no permanent abodes decamp and flee the haunted place whenever a death has occurred, exercising precautions that the ghost shall not follow them, for instance, carrying their weapons pointed backward and stacking them in that position when they stop to sleep. The precautions to be taken are suggested by desire and analogy, and faith in them developed by the process already repeatedly referred to. Most frequently people try to conciliate the ghost. They gather in the presence of the dying and praise him inordinately and exhibit signs of mourning at

his departure. They are careful after his death to continue the forms of praise and mourning, even at times hiring men to keep up the demonstration of grief. No one dares to use anything that had belonged to the dead, for fear of exciting jealous vengeance. His standing crops are burned and his personal belongings are burned, or cast into the sea, or buried with the corpse. Thus there is no saving from generation to generation to promote economic progress, but each generation destroys the accumulations of its predecessors.

The burning of property with the body of the dead results not only from fear of using the belongings of a ghost but also sometimes from an intention to provide the departed with the spiritual essence—the double—of that which he has used here and will require hereafter; for if the man has a double, why should not a bow or a knife or a tree or a mountain have a double as well as a shadow and a reflection? Belief that inanimate things as well as living beings have an unseeable counterpart or essence, a soul or “*anima*,” is widespread. For example, in Japan the housewife attributes a soul to her kitchen utensils, and the soldier to his sword. This belief is called animism.

The propitiation of the spirits of the dead by praises, prayers, and sacrifices is carried on at the places of burial. Thus, said Spencer, graves become the first altars and tombs the first temples.

It is felt to be especially necessary to propitiate the spirit of a great and powerful chief, whose mysterious powers the timorous imagination is free to exaggerate unchecked and uncomforted by any saving ray of knowledge. All peoples, as they progress, tend to gather glorifying traditions about some great characters in their history. Thus while each family or clan worships and propitiates the spirits of its own particular dead forbears, the families enter also into the worship of the heroes of the whole tribe or people. This implies a considerable degree of advancement, and is especially characteristic of the patriarchal phase of social evolution. Any patriarch under whom the tribe particularly prospers contributes real incidents, and patriotic and religious imagination add more, all of which tend to gather about the name of a few or of one of

those from whom the group believes itself descended, and the spirits of these dead heroes become the tribal gods.

In the earlier stages of its development religion is chiefly a matter of fear and not of hope or love; but in the stage just described it is natural to think that the household or tribal divinities will exercise their powers in the interest of their own "chosen people." This is accompanied by the belief that other peoples have their gods who are favorable to them, so that in case of warfare the contest is thought to be between both the unseen and the visible representatives of each people.

A conquering people believes that its gods are conquering gods, lords of lords, and kings over all gods. To regard their own god as superior in power and other attributes is not the same as to become philosophical monotheists. Their belief is not monotheism but monarchy among divinities. Monotheism comes very late, and when we speak of the "gods" of other peoples than ourselves it is customary to refer by that name to all the invisible beings with superhuman powers in which they believe, and perhaps to forget that it has been usual for Christian peoples to believe in many invisible beings with superhuman powers. If we had discovered Milton's *Paradise Lost* written in a strange tongue and calling its supernatural beings by other names than ours, we should not have hesitated to pronounce it the expression of a highly polytheistic religion.

In the roots of its development religion has no essential connection with morality or righteousness. The gods were thought of as exhibiting the motives and passions which man would exercise if he feared no superior, and religious conduct was simply the etiquette or ceremony of the court of the unseen potentate. And as man was always in the presence of the unseen he was always living at court and must regulate his every action by the required ceremonial. It was natural and inevitable to think that the requirements of the unseen would resemble those enforced by visible rulers, and there was a general correspondence between the obeisances, adulation, and tribute rendered to both. Conversely, visible rulers have been quick to avail themselves of the obvious addition to their own power which resulted whenever peoples could be made to feel that the

gods required that which the visible rulers commanded. The fact that the difference between gods and kings was not very wide, in the minds of ancestor-worshipping peoples who as yet were far from the concept of monotheism, is shown by the practice of according divine honors to living potentates. Omitting, for the present, many qualifications, we may say that ethical requirements result from the lessons of experience concerning that which promotes or diminishes the common welfare. Rulers early recognize the teaching of experience as to what promotes the tribal strength and solidarity for purposes of war, and in the patriarchal phase they are not blind to that which promotes economic prosperity. As soon as rulers or leading men (prophets) become deeply interested in the tribal welfare they feel certain that what they are convinced the common good requires is in accordance with the will of the unseen spirit patriarchs and divinities of the tribe, and so they declare to the people that to secure divine favor and avert divine wrath, to secure prosperity in basket and store and victory over their adversaries, they must fulfil not only ceremonial but also ethical requirements. When, to proffered rewards and threatened punishments in this life, is added the thought that the same unseen potentates will rule and continue their favor or disfavor in a life to come, religion becomes a yet more stupendous agency of social control.

Two distinct tendencies in the development of religions are recognized by scholars. The first may be called the priestly tendency and the second the prophetic; the first is based chiefly on fear, the second more on hope and love; the first inculcates ritual requirements, the ceremonies and observances by which to court the favor of the invisible potentate and all distinctively religious demands, while it looks down upon "mere" morality, insisting far less loudly upon righteousness than upon religious conformity, but the second inculcates chiefly ethical requirements, it may even say, "Incense is an abomination unto me" (Isa. 1:13-17); "Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousand rivers of oil? . . . What doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" (Mic. 6:7, 8). The first approaches deity with supplication, praises and flattery, conciliation and atonement, in order to secure favor and

favors, the second trusts an ever-waiting love and does not seek special favors but finds the sufficient reward of communion in the sense of personal relation with the divine; the first is predominantly selfish, a means by which the worshiper may secure to himself the divine favor, avoid calamity, secure prosperity, and save his own soul; the second is benevolent and patriotic, prescribes the method by which to secure the common prosperity and triumph of the group, and at its highest aspires toward a universal kingdom of righteousness, the establishment of which is the supreme co-operative enterprise in which all good men combine with God, and what is "done to one of the least" of the great brotherhood is done unto the God of all; the first is conservative and reactionary, ever calling upon men to maintain "the religion of their fathers," and unwilling that any belief or practice regarded as religious should be abandoned or modified; the second is progressive, always adapting its requirements to existing exigencies and likely to say, "Ye have heard that it was said unto you by them of old time . . . but verily I say unto you"—that requirements once thought essential are unimportant and that only vision that distinguishes the ethically fundamental from matter of observance and opinion and applies universal principles to the present demands of society can fulfil the will of God.

IV. INSPIRATION AND MIRACLE

The fourth root from which religious beliefs and practices have grown is found in inspiration and miracle. These are unusual psychic states and unusual events which are ascribed to supernatural agency.

By the words inspiration and miracle I here refer to realities. In a prescientific age with a people among whom religious beliefs are already established miracle tales spread and grow with great facility, but it is real events and experiences that play a part in the origination of such beliefs.

Between inspiration and miracle no absolute line need be drawn, but we will first give attention chiefly to inspiration. It is said that "by far the majority of the impressions on our senses leave no trace in conscious recollection, although they are stored in the records

of the brain." According to this view the subconscious stores are our capital, our states of consciousness are the interest we collect, and all our past experience is on deposit. It is sufficiently impressive to think that even a major part of the sights and sounds and thoughts that were ever present to our vivid consciousness are stored as records in the recesses of memory and that from this vast half-hidden accumulation we draw the interpretations that give meaning to the perceptions and thoughts of each passing moment. We have not only this vast hidden store, we have also hidden processes of combination and recombination, of fermentation and growth, among these hidden elements. It is even said that such subconscious action "is not only common but practically if not absolutely constant," and even if we are staggered at the thought of its continuity we may all admit that "the results of this unperceived labor of our minds are often far more valuable than those of our intelligent efforts." Now and then, under stimulating or otherwise favorable conditions, one may experience an upgush out of the stores of his mentality, so far beyond his ordinary powers and containing conceptions and conclusions that have been reached by a process of which he has been so unconscious, that he says, "This is not mine, it has been given me!" Thus the poets and the novelists often speak. Most of the great art work of the world has been of this character; it is everywhere spoken of as the product of inspiration. In this respect as in some others religious revelation resembles art.

A state of concentration and eager expectancy is favorable to such experience, so that the earnest prayer of faith is likely to be answered by consolations and decisions. An experience that is eagerly desired and at the same time sought and expected is naturally produced by auto-suggestion, so that the "seeker" is likely soon to cry out, "I've got it, I've got it." The presence of an expectant surrounding group and similar experiences on the part of others effectively heighten the power of auto-suggestion.

Dreams also are upswellings out of the unconscious. They are likely to be closely related to recent or intense waking states. Thus, for example, those whose death has been recently witnessed are

likely to be seen in dreams and this powerfully confirms belief in life after death—not necessarily in immortal life, for at least some savages have not formed that concept, but believe that those who are no longer seen in dreams or remembered by the living are spiritually and totally deceased. Because of the close relation between waking thoughts and dreams the latter frequently suggest answers to problems of the waking life, and even when this relation to any reality is least, still the thoughts that come with waking are likely to interpret the dream into some connection with themselves. Moreover, the elements contained in dreams, however fantastically they may be recombined, are all afforded by previous mental states and so they are likely to corroborate and powerfully confirm the beliefs already held.

The last is also true of visions seen in trance, and other abnormal states. Especially death-bed visions are likely to confirm, as with ocular demonstration, faiths concerning the life to come. Visions and hallucinations are common in disease, and often occur in the final disturbance of the brain that precedes dissolution, and at that time the mind is full of thoughts and hopes or fears concerning the hereafter, and established beliefs are not unlikely to visualize themselves.

One of the widespread practices of early religions is to induce the physical states that are accompanied by hallucinations. Inhaling of gases, long abstinence from food, dances carried to the point of exhaustion are among the familiar means of obtaining trances and visions.¹

Quite commonly boys, at the time of initiation into manhood, are expected to secure by aid of fasts and vigils some vision, revelation, or ecstatic state. The breaking-down of normal nervous co-ordination is a cultivated art so that among certain peoples, as the African Zulus, it is said that "any adult can cast himself or herself into the hypnotic state." Those with especially unstable nervous systems are generally regarded as religiously gifted and likely to become medicine men, priests, or priestesses. The supernatural origin of the mental states thus obtained is confidently assumed and unintelligible babblings are regarded as mystic utter-

¹ Davenport, *Primitive Traits in Religious Experience*; James, *Varieties of Religious Experience*.

ances in unknown tongues. Even in America and in present times a person who becomes cataleptic under great religious excitement is sometimes spoken of as "possessed by the Holy Ghost."

And now as to miracles, any strange and unexplained event is practically certain to be taken, by people who are in a prescientific stage of development, as a miracle. The miracles which especially deserve our attention are the miracles of healing. The power of the mind over the body is now an established fact. The action of the mind not only constantly controls our voluntary muscles, but also, in common experience, it causes the vital organs to alter their operations, so that the cheek flushes or blanches, the heart palpitates, the functions of the alimentary canal and of the liver, salivary and other glands are stopped or quickened or perturbed. The great majority of diseases (it is said four-fifths) are caused by irregularities in the functioning of the organs rather than injuries to the organs themselves. This being so, how vast a power over health and disease has the mind! As the mind through the nerves can absolutely control the voluntary muscles, so it seems that scarcely less absolutely can it control all the functions of the body. If one were to be as certain that his heart would double, or abate by half, its beating at a given hour as he can be that he will leave his office for his home at that hour, the effect upon his heart would apparently be little, if at all, less certain than that upon his muscles of locomotion. The facts in substantiation of such a view are exceedingly numerous.¹

¹ A Frenchman of rank was condemned to death for a crime, and his friends, willing to avoid the scandal of a public execution, allowed him to be made the subject of an experiment. He was told that he must be bled to death. His eyes were bandaged, and his arm having been lightly pricked a stream of warm water was made to trickle down it and fall into a basin, while the assistants kept up a running commentary upon his supposed condition. "He is getting faint, the heart's action is becoming feebler; his pulse is almost gone," and other remarks of the sort. In a short time the miserable man died with the actual symptoms of cardiac syncope from hemorrhage, without having lost a drop of blood (*Treatment by Hypnotism and Suggestion or Psycho-Therapeutics*, 5th ed., p. 30).

Among savage tribes, in undoubted and repeated instances, the curse kills as certainly as the knife. Among Western Indians of our country, when a medicine man gathers his medicine, that is, rises to the full height of inspired volition, and utters a withering curse upon his antagonist commanding him to die, the latter knows all hope is lost. Sometimes he drops dead on the spot, or at best lingers through a few days of misery (Brinton, *Religions of Primitive Peoples*, pp. 90-100).

The power of the mind over the body is not only for cursing and death, but also for blessing, health, and recovery. "A mind to live" and "the expectation of recovery" as well as "the welcoming of death" have their direct effect. Scientific books are now written concerning the part of suggestion in therapeutics.¹ "In all ages wonderful cures, real amid a multitude of shams, have been wrought at holy places dedicated to various saints of various cults." Of the throngs who for centuries have sought and still seek healing at Mecca, at the sacred rivers and shrines of Hinduism and Buddhism, in the Grotto of our Lady of Lourdes, before the holy coat of Treves, and at a hundred other holy places of the Catholic church by no means all have been disappointed. "Touching for the king's evil did no doubt effect many cures." Great numbers of healers in all lands and ages, from the savage medicine man to Alexander Dowie, and of all degrees of sham and of sanctity from charlatans who inspired faith in doctrines that to them were pure pretense, to Martin Luther, Dorothea Trudel, and many other believers in divine intervention in behalf of the sick, have taken practical advantage of the mind's power over the bodily functions. They have inspired confident expectation of recovery by appeal to the most various beliefs, and the confident expectation has caused effects that have confirmed the belief, whether it was belief in the power of Gunga or of Allah, and whether the prophet were Brigham Young or the reverent and saintly Charles Cullis.

Out of the "four roots" which we have now described there have grown masses of the most various belief and practice, characteristic of peoples of every stage of ethical advancement. But quite as impressive as the variety of these beliefs are the resemblances between many of them. Similar beliefs about the zoöomorphic cosmogony are widely diffused, and were participated in by the early Semites whose traditions we inherit. Beliefs concerning the hereafter exhibit many interesting similarities. Various peoples possess a cycle of myths based upon the conflict of nature, of day and light with night and darkness, of summer and warmth with winter, cold, and storm, of youth with age, health with disease, life

¹ See a selected bibliography in *Hypnotism and Its Applications to Practical Medicine*, by Otto Georg Wetterstrand, M.D., translated by Henrik G. Peterson, M.D.

with death, good with evil, and hold that victory will not always rest with the powers of darkness, for as they believe in great heroes, conquerors, teachers of useful arts and virtues who have lived in the past so also they have for the future a messianic hope.

The foregoing discussion has not raised the question whether the religious beliefs of the tribes of mankind correspond with any reality, but has only traced the method of the origins of these beliefs, considered as prevalent social phenomena. Human intelligence, developed in connection with fitting a tiny round of activities to certain superficial aspects of a very limited environment, is at first no more adequate to comprehend in detail the whole and ultimate truth about the universe than man's voice and hearing are adequate to maintain converse with the inhabitants of the planets that revolve about some fixed star. Science has somewhat widened the narrow circumference of man's knowledge and replaced his earliest guesses, but has not illuminated the telescopic spaces of his ignorance. The more man's knowledge grows, the vaster his estimate of that which lies beyond the compass of his senses. At first he imagined nature spirits in the form of men or beasts, long he conceived the methods of creation on the analogy of human artifice. Later he has begun to get some hints of a method of creation far more divine than man's imagination could have invented, to see that the power at work in nature does not operate by the contraction of muscles, that a universal intelligence cannot depend upon the neuroses of a brain, that power and intelligence independent of organic mechanism may well be freed from boundaries of space, or limitations of attention, that the words omnipotent and omnipresent may have real meaning, and that the power and the intelligence that are adequate to the continuous causation of all the phenomena of such a universe as this cannot be portrayed in human terms and under a bodily semblance.

All savages and all children are idolators—in the sense that they tend to imagine visible embodiments of divinity. The God of childhood is likely to be “a benevolent old gentleman with a long white beard.” We first shrink from chiseling or painting him, not because we doubt that he has a limited and sensible shape, but because we think that we know his form and features imperfectly,

as we do that of a relative whom we have never met, and because we think our art inadequate. In the Middle Ages, artists confident of their pictorial powers did not hesitate to paint portraits of Jehovah. There is no fundamental difference between the worship of a god whose features are portrayed in stone or upon a canvas and worshipping one whose idolon is conceived in human form within the mind. As we have seen, probably no men were ever idolaters in the crude sense of worshipping images as more than the representation of an unseen being, and probably no people that has risen high has been free from the tendency to make of its God an idolon in spacial form. When the beliefs of any people seem to us utterly absurd we may be almost if not quite certain that it is because we do not understand them or get at their point of view. Perhaps, for some purposes it does no harm for men to think of God in terms of human personality, but they should remember that he is more than can be comprehended in those terms. As one cannot drink the Amazon, but afloat upon its mighty bosom may dip up from those waters in a cup as much as he can drink, so we who live and move and have our being in the infinite, although we cannot conceive the infinite, may slake our soul's thirst with thoughts of God in terms of human personality, judging that our thought is not then more than the truth but immeasurably less.